

CREAMER, ROBERT W. *Baseball and Other Matters in 1941*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000. Pp. viii + 317. Photographs, index. \$11.95 pb.

Robert Creamer, the long-time editor and contributor to *Sports Illustrated*, was in his first year of college with “a lack of sophistication and confidence” (64) in 1941. His personal account of that year, which he believes was unique in baseball history, mingles baseball memories, war events, and family activities with a mixture of nostalgia, longing and satisfaction. This is an account of a Yankee far-no one south of Jersey City or west of the Hudson River matters much.

The story is set against the background of the 1930s. The New York Yankees, producing arguably their best teams ever, won consecutive pennants from 1936-39. After missing the championship in 1940, the Yanks struggled early in 1941, the last pre-World War II season, until they finally meshed and topped the American League. The revival of the Brooklyn Dodgers added interest in baseball in New York that same year. The Dodgers had not won the National League since 1920, and a great dual with the St. Louis Cardinals finally brought the pennant and a “Subway World Series” with the Yankees in the autumn of ‘41.

Creamer recounts key games of 1941 from newspaper and radio accounts and interprets with his own flair individuals such as Dodgers manager Leo Durocher, colorful outfielder Pete Reiser, and creative General Manager Lee MacPhail in Cincinnati and Brooklyn. He also recalls the draft difficulties of Detroit Tiger Hank Greenberg and a myriad of other player stories.

Throughout the book Creamer injects the batting feats of Ted Williams and his season-long pursuit of a .400 batting average, and DiMaggio’s day-by-day construction of a 56-game hitting streak. He notes perceptively that this was before Williams and DiMaggio were revered stars; they had difficult personalities, and fans were not as adoring (particularly when they were out of the lineup) of these two legends then they are today. Interestingly, DiMaggio, despite hitting in 72 of 73 games and having several multiple hit games in 1941, was only the third-best hitter (.357), behind Williams (.406) and Cecil Travis (.359) of the Washington Senators. Travis had 25 more hits than “Joltin’ Joe” and 33 more than Williams. Both Williams and DiMaggio were injury prone, but Travis was in the lineup nearly every day. However, Creamer never mentions Travis, even when discussing key games between Washington and New York or Boston.

Creamer writes crisply and clearly, with Spartan usage of adjectives, a blessing in a field that invites (and constantly overuses) them. Each chapter of five to ten pages concentrates on an incident in baseball, his family, a piece of war news, or something else that influenced him that summer. The author places these neatly in the context of his overall view of baseball in 1941, and delivers a readable memoir of the period. Again we must note that this is Creamer’s view of the last pro-war season. No doubt 1941 was a good year for a young Yankee fan and even a Dodger supporter. However, there have been other superb pennant challenges and events in other cities, such as the pennant race in 1908 (see David W. Anderson’s *More Than Merkle*), the 1949 race in Boston, the Giants’ great comeback in 1951, the 1920 chases with rumblings of a ‘fixed’ 1919 World Series, and the home run derby between Mark McGuire and Sammy Sosa in 1991. Each baseball enthusiast could have his or her own favorite year with personal, historical, and baseball memories. Robert Creamer adroitly provides an example through his writing of why baseball is such a significant part of many American experiences.

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